

## **“PERFORMATIVE” AND “COGNITIVE”: ABOUT TWO COMMUNICATIVE STATUSES OF MEDIA TEXTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the paper two statuses, which a media text can acquire depending on communicative conditions, are examined. At the time of its publication a media text can be viewed as performative utterance, since by definition it is involved in the practical activities of the society and tied to specific coordinates of social space-time. In a short time after being published any media text inevitably loses its practical purpose, and its communication state is determined only by its ability to store the underlying information. The text in such a communicative condition can be categorized as a cognitive utterance. Having lost its touch with the practical life of the society, it remains relevant only as a carrier of information, as an artifact of the era.

**Key words:** media text, performative, communicative status, social space-time

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In media text studies, researchers often use one of the two theoretical frameworks – either the theory of functional styles or the discourse analysis theory. In both cases we consider the media text as an object of study; however, the subject of the research is seen differently.

In the view of functional stylistics any media text is considered as a representative of publicistic functional style [Kozhina 2003], hence description of the main features of such texts is based on the analysis of large text arrays, which allows to identify and describe the main parameters of the publicistic style and to identify particular genres and subgenres. At the same time those features that are peculiar to a single text, are not taken into account.

From the viewpoint of the discourse analysis conceptual system a media text is studied in the aspect of its being predetermined by the extra-linguistic factors [van Dijk 1977, 1988]. Media text is considered here as an element of an ongoing sequence of texts. However, the principal attitude toward considering the text as the verbal component of the tide of life leads to the fact that researchers concentrate on the individual characteristics of the text, those features that are due to the influence of specific extra-linguistic factors.

There is every reason to believe that these two perceptions of the media are in a complementary relationship and can be correlated within a theoretical concept, which is offered below.

### **2. METHOD**

In the research described here, a comparative method was used with the elements of system analysis. Theoretical concept developed in the research is based on the analysis of a large number of media texts of different content and different genres. The analysis was implemented in the context of developing the conception of stylistic studies at the faculties of journalism.

In terms of relations to reality, any media text can exist in two different communicative conditions. At the time of publication, the communicative status of a media text is defined by the fact that it is integrated into the practical life of the society, being a part of this life. We propose to define such texts as performative utterances, keeping in mind that the term “a performative utterance” refers to the communicative status of a text.

Over time, the media text becomes more and more estranged from the current reality, losing its relevance and moving from the sphere of actual information into the sphere of background knowledge. As time goes on, a text becomes an artifact of the era; the text’s communicative state appears to be transformed, and the message no longer corresponds with the practical activities of today. Such texts should be treated as “cognitive utterances”. We offer this term, keeping in mind that the cognitive utterance is also the name of the communicative status of the text.

### **3. ANALYSIS**

Analysis of these two communicative statuses (conditions) of the text means drawing attention to the peculiarities of how the communication status of the text can change.

Let’s examine a material published in the independent national newspaper of the Krasnodar territory “Volnaya Kuban” under the heading “News of the Tuapse District.” In order to consider the communicative state of the text at the time of its publication, we can imagine that we are reading a text on the day of its publication:

*Congratulations, “Hitch”!*

*At the XVI National Festival of Folk Groups “Kuban Cossack”, which was held in the village of Lazarevskoye, young artists of the “Hitch” exemplary choreographic ensemble from the Children’s Art School named by G. Ponomarenko of the Novomikhailovsky village (Tuapse district) showed high class.*

*The team was awarded the second degree (the first degree was not awarded to anyone) in the "Folk Dance Ensembles" nomination. More than 40 folk groups and soloists from Moscow, Novosibirsk, Yaroslavl, Penza, Abkhazia and Adygeya regions, took part in the festival, as well as collectives and soloists of the region's cities and districts (12.07.2014).*

We see that the significance of this text's content is strictly limited by the coordinates of social space-time. The text was interesting only for residents of Tuapse region and stayed relevant only in the period of time when the XVI National Festival of Folk Groups "Kuban Cossack" was held. The text is dedicated to the particular event (the festival of folk bands) and also to the fact that the ensemble "hitch" was the best participant. Among the individuals, for whom these topics are relevant, are the following groups: the members of the ensemble "hitch", their relatives, friends, acquaintances, visitors of the festival, some other residents of Tuapse region, and readers of the "Free Kuban". This publication's communicative purpose can be defined as congratulations to the "Hitch" ensemble.

A change of coordinates of social space-time is impossible for such a text as it will lose the meaning of existence. The press of England, Germany, and other countries would not reprint this material, because the situation presented in the text was not embedded in the life of these countries. The newspaper "Volnaya Kuban" would not reprint this text either, as it is possible to congratulate only once and only at the end of the contest.

The close relationship of such media texts with the society's life is due to the fact that such text is a part of this life, the nature of which is generally non-verbal and has a practical. Thus, the publication is itself an integral part of this festival. Congratulation as a speech act stands in the same line with the other actions that make up the festival: the selection of participants, preparation of premises, search of funding, pronouncing the speeches, arrival of the participants, their accommodation and departure etc. Being a part of the society's life, these congratulatory texts are functionally identical with the non-verbal actions, thus we can classify these texts as performatives.

The term "performative", as it is known, was introduced to linguistics by D. Austin and was applied to utterances (sentences), equivalent to actions [Austin]. Nowadays a performative is conventionally treated as "a statement that is equivalent to an action, an act" [Arutyunova]. To understand the performatives' specificity it is fundamentally important to keep in mind that a performative "is part of the context of life events, creating a social, communicative or interpersonal situation, which leads to certain consequences" (for example, declarations of war, declarations, wills, oaths, oath, apologies, administrative and military orders, etc. are treated as performatives) [Arutyunova].

It is important to note that in the most known classifications of speech acts performative do not form a special group, the performative is, rather, an aspect or, as one might say, one of the characteristics of the speech act. It is no coincidence that in the classification of J. R. Searle representative, directive, commissive, expressive utterances as well as declarations are presented [Searle]. Searle also considers performative verbs, which, "constituting a sort of paradigm in each of these five classes, have different syntactic properties" [Searle].

The question is, whether it is appropriate to use the term "performative", applying it to the text, though originally the term was intended to characterize verbs and speech acts (statements)?

To find the answer to this question, we consider it necessary to appeal to an important idea, declared by M. M. Bakhtin many years ago. Bakhtin distinguished text as a linguistic structure and text as a product (compound statement). In the first case it is a self-sufficient subject, there is a system of relationships between signs within the text. In the second case, when a text is treated as a product, we inevitably have to keep in mind that it is perceived by a certain subject (reader), who comprehends the text in the process of reading and thus spends his time in the reality of the text. Only through the subject's perception, the text joins in the complex system of modern knowledge and social relations. Here are the considerations offered by M. M. Bakhtin: "Linguistics deals with texts but not with products of speech. The statements linguistics makes referring to the speech product, are smuggled into the reasoning (we call it smuggling as these statements do not result directly from purely linguistic analysis). Of course, usually such linguistic considerations have conglomeratic character and are full of extra linguistic elements. Somewhat simplifying the matter, we can say that purely linguistic relations (that is, the subject of linguistics) are the relationships of between signs within a system of language or text (i. e. system or linear relations between signs: sign to sign/signs). The relationship of statements to reality, to the real speaking subject and to other statements, these relationships, which first make statements true or false, beautiful, etc., can never become the subject of linguistics. Individual signs of a language system, as well as a text (as a symbolic unity) can neither be true, nor false, nor excellent etc." [Bakhtin]. Proceeding from the understanding of communication as "a dialogue, transmission of information from person to person – a specific form of interaction between people in the processes of their cognitive and working activities, carried out mainly with the help of language (less often – with the help of other sign systems)" [Great Encyclopedic Dictionary], we conclude that a text as a product should be considered the true unit of communication, and not a text as an iconic structure. "An utterance (a speech product) as an inimitable, historically unique individual whole" [Bakhtin] actually means a text in its current state, a text immersed in life, in its specific coordinates of multi-dimensional social space-time.

An actual media text by its very nature carries a performative component, as it is more an action than a text. Media researchers used to believe that the general function of modern journalism consists in the formation and development of social consciousness for the purpose of cultivating people's socio-psychological traits, attitudes, and beliefs.

The idea of qualifying texts as performatives or eliciting performative components in the text has already been expressed by researchers in connection with other problems, which seem revealing to us. For instance, Yu. Habermas, analyzing a text, where self-representation of an individual took place, considered it possible to define it as performative [Habermas].

Our conception of performative texts (developed within the system of categories of stylistics) is in good agreement with the approach to the qualification of texts as performatives, developed by the representatives of philosophical science. A congratulation published in a newspaper is not only a text of the congratulation, but also an action – a congratulation as such.

The idea of qualifying some texts as performatives can be found in the papers where linguopragmatic text studies are made with a focus on the problems of deixis [Maksimov]. Any text can be defined in relation to the category of deixis, since we are dealing with natural language. Any statement in any natural language is somehow related to the reality, because a text fragments the reality, while pointing out one particular fragment. Being defined in the social space-time coordinates, a performative media text inevitably actualizes this deictic component.

A text in its actual state (and in the media, accordingly, that is a performative text), is studied by the theory of discourse, where discourse is often referred to as not only the theory of discourse, but also as an object of research, a text which is taken at the time of implementation. Within the theory of discourse, "the time of its direct involvement in the act of

communication" is actualized. M. Y. Dymarsky pointed out the conditionality of the text as an object of discursive research [Dymarsky].

In this regard, we would like to note that the consideration of media texts as actual texts that are inscribed in the structure of practical activity, is not a feature of the theory of discourse, but a feature of media texts themselves. This feature does not result from any theoretical construct; on the contrary, its detection is based on direct observation of the live speech. A media text is at the time of its birth inscribed in the life of society, and is determined primarily by the coordinates of social space-time. At this point, a performative component is actualized in the text, hence we propose to refer to media texts taken in their actual communicative condition as "performative texts".

Now we turn to a different communicative condition, which is acquired by the text when it is transferred from actual concrete situations of life into the world of knowledge, the cognitive sphere.

Media texts rather quickly escape the current reality. Today's newspaper seems to be completely useless in a week or two. Some texts, that contain a particular interesting information, are transferred to another communicational environment. Let us imagine that material given above ("Congratulations, "Hitch"!" from the "Volnaya Kuban" newspaper) 10 years after its emergence being read by a researcher of Russian press, who is leafing through the newspaper files in a library or an archive. Formally, the text remains the same, as it was 10 years before. However, its relationship with the reader is fundamentally different.

In the described case, we have lost close relatedness of the media text with the moment of reading by the newspaper audience. The text is no longer associated with a particular day, which is present-day for the reader; accordingly, the text is no longer looking for a reader. Such a text can be read anywhere and anytime. To the reader (the researcher in our case) it is an artifact of the era. Such a media text, which has the status of an artifact of the era, is perceived only as a carrier of all sorts of information. Being not correlated with the coordinate system of multidimensional living space any longer, it now entirely belongs to the world of knowledge. The text goes into a cognitive communicative state, which is determined by its belonging to the world of knowledge and the loss of connection with specific spatial and temporal coordinates of modernity.

The change of the communication status from performative to cognitive means changing of the text's communicational environment. While basic environment, in which media texts as performative texts are immersed, is represented by all kinds of media (print, radio, television), media texts as cognitive texts exist in information repositories: newspaper files in libraries, archives, and various specialized sites, etc.

Since a media text receives the "cognitive" status, its ability to establish contact with the audience is considerably reduced; such text is only available to the one who seeks it. Despite the fact that the text in the process of its transition to cognitive state remains the same as it was at the time of publication, its functional structure undergoes significant changes. For instance, the header complex loses all initial functions, which, at the time of publication, are aimed at the text's positioning in the reader environment. The reader (i. e. the researcher) in the choice of text is not guided by interesting announcement, header or other elements of the system of positioning of the text, but deliberately selects the text according to the research topics he is interested in. In this case such elements as, for example, boxes containing key quotes from the text, do not perform their functions to attract attention, advertise, put more expression etc. Neither the article's layout nor the infographic elements can influence the reader's (researcher's) decision to read or not to read the text.

#### 4. RESULTS

We can conclude that media texts change two communicative statuses during the time of their existence, when they are in the society's field of view. When a media text appears (on the pages of newspapers, for example), it has a performative status because such text is an action integrated into the practical activities of the society. The text then passes gradually into the cognitive sphere, in the world of information and knowledge, losing the direct and immediate connection with the current reality.

In conclusion, let us determine the prospects for further research in line with the introduced ideas. When the communication status of the text changes, it often means that the communication environment of the text's existence changes also, which entails some consequences. This dip of the text into the secondary communicative environment leads to a reduction of the role of non-verbal components, which function primarily as means of establishing contact. The degree of polymodality of the text decreases. At its performative stage, in the time a media text is published, it is accompanied by photographs, diagrams, graphs, charts, tables, frames, auxiliary texts that are not always reproduced when the text is moved to a different communicational environment. An automatic consequence of reducing the degree of polymodality of media texts is the fact that the intensity of a dialogical relationship with the reader decreases. All these transformations seem to be a very important object for the recent media linguistic studies introducing a praxeological view and focusing on intentional characteristics of media texts [Dobrosklonskaya 2014, 2015, Duskaeva 2015a, 2015b]. Referring to media texts as "performative" and "cognitive" texts can help researchers in describing discursive characteristics of journalistic products.

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